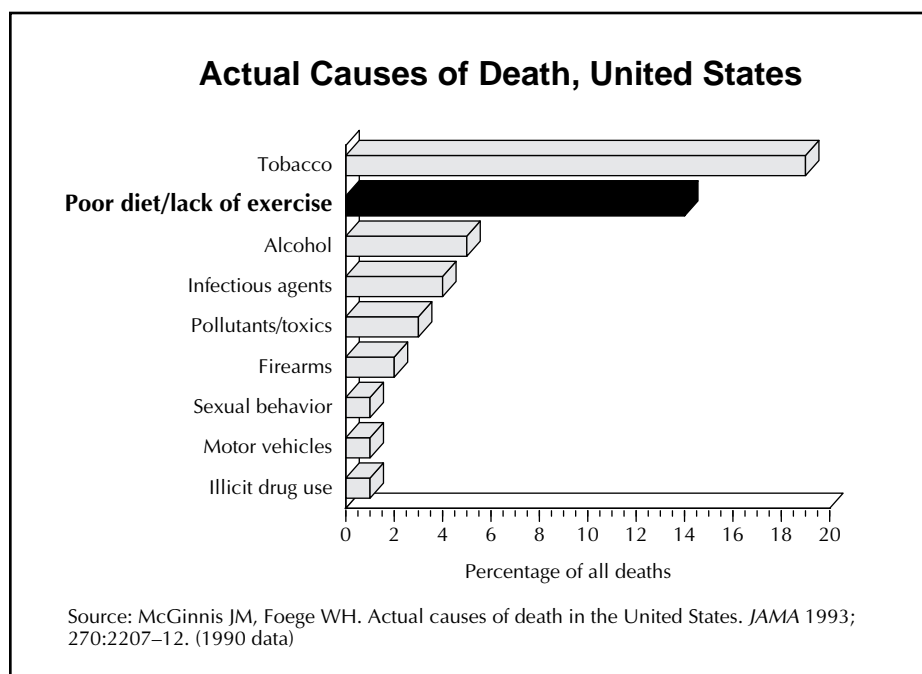


Physical Activity and Good Nutrition: Essential Elements for Good Health

AT-A-GLANCE
1998



“Americans of all ages are heavier than ever before. This trend, along with the aging of the nation’s population, is increasing the risk for heart attack and stroke. Improving the health of Americans through physical activity and good nutrition must become a national priority.”

Martha N. Hill, RN, PhD
President, American Heart Association



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention



Physical Activity and Good Nutrition: Essential Elements for Good Health

Every year, chronic diseases claim the lives of more than one and a half million Americans. These diseases account for 7 of every 10 deaths in the United States each year and for more than 60% of total medical care expenditures. In addition, the prolonged illness and disability associated with many chronic diseases results in decreased quality of life for millions of Americans.

Much of the chronic disease burden is preventable. To a certain degree, the major chronic disease killers—cardiovascular disease, cancer, and diabetes—are an extension of what individuals do, or what they do not do, as they go about the business of daily living. The actual underlying contributors to much of the chronic disease burden are a limited number of health-damaging behaviors practiced by people every day for much of their lives.

Physical inactivity and unhealthy eating are risk behaviors with a critical impact on health. Together, they are responsible for at least 300,000 preventable deaths each year. Only tobacco use causes more preventable deaths in the United States.

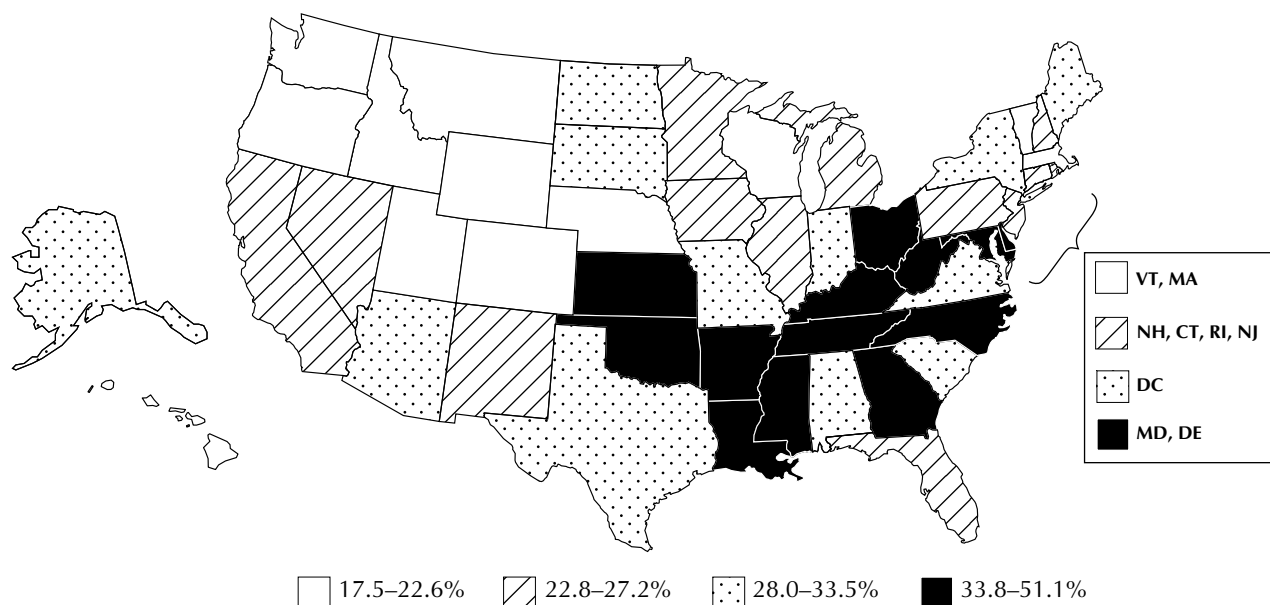
Promoting regular physical activity and healthy eating and creating an environment that supports these behaviors are essential to reducing the burden of

chronic diseases. Chronic diseases do not have to be an inevitable consequence of aging. People who live healthfully and avoid the behaviors that increase their risk for chronic diseases can expect to have healthier, longer lives.

Lack of Physical Activity Among Americans Despite Proven Benefits

Regular physical activity provides short-term benefits and reduces long-term risks for disability and premature death. Moreover, physical activity need not be strenuous to be beneficial; men and women of all ages benefit from moderate physical activity, such as 30 minutes of brisk walking five or more times a week. Regular physical activity substantially reduces the risk of dying of coronary heart disease, the nation's leading cause of death, and decreases the risk of colon cancer, diabetes, and high blood pressure. Regular physical activity also helps to control weight; contributes to the development and maintenance of healthy bones, muscles, and joints; and reduces symptoms of anxiety and depression. For many people with arthritis, physical activity helps to relieve pain and maintain joint mobility.

Percentage of Adults Who Reported No Leisure-Time Physical Activity, 1996



Source: CDC, Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (provisional data).

The Food Guide Pyramid

Fats, Oils & Sweets
USE SPARINGLY

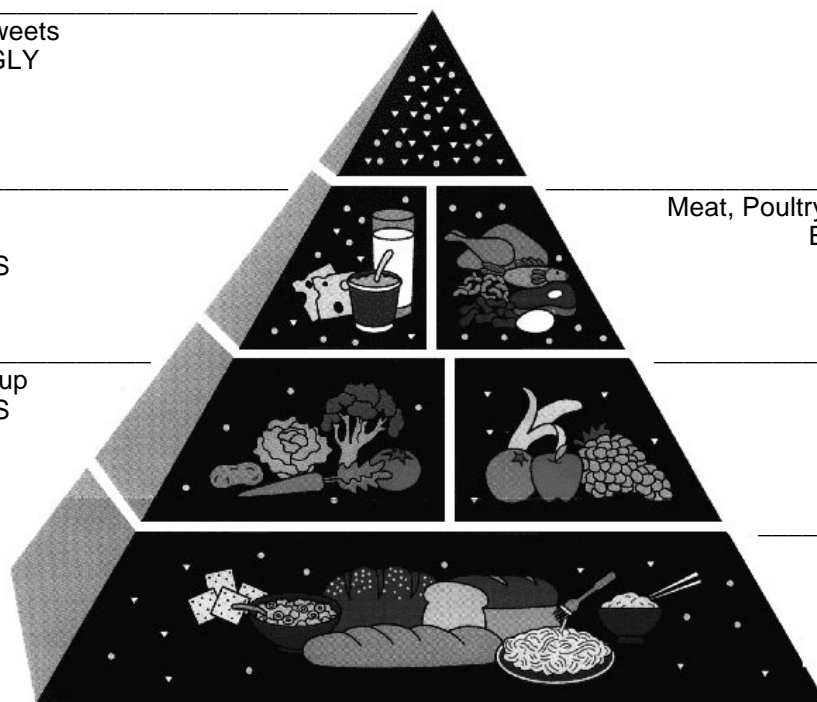
Milk, Yogurt &
Cheese Group
2-3 SERVINGS

Meat, Poultry, Fish, Dry Beans,
Eggs & Nuts Group
2-3 SERVINGS

Vegetable Group
3-5 SERVINGS

Fruit Group
2-4 SERVINGS

Bread, Cereal,
Rice & Pasta
Group
6-11 SERVINGS



Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Human Nutrition Information Service, 1993.

Despite the proven benefits of being physically active, more than 60% of adults do not engage in levels of physical activity necessary to provide health benefits. One-fourth of U.S. adults are not active at all in their leisure time. Activity decreases with age and is less common among women than men and among those with lower income and less education.

Insufficient physical activity is not limited to adults. Information gathered through CDC's Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System indicates that nearly half of young people aged 12 to 21 do not regularly engage in vigorous physical activity. Daily participation in high school physical education classes dropped from 42% in 1991 to 25% in 1995.

Healthy Eating Is Critical to Healthy Living

We now know that good nutrition lowers a person's risk for many chronic diseases, including coronary heart disease, stroke, some types of cancer, diabetes, and osteoporosis.

Americans are slowly changing their eating patterns toward healthier diets. However, a considerable gap remains between recommended dietary patterns and what Americans actually eat. Information from CDC's

Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System indicates that only 27% of women and 19% of men eat the recommended five or more servings of fruits and vegetables each day. Although the amounts of total fat, saturated fatty acids, and cholesterol that Americans consume have decreased, they remain above recommended levels for a large proportion of the population. More than a third of the nation's adults (some 58 million people) are overweight, and more than 3 million women weigh at least 100 pounds more than their recommended body weight.

Like adults, many young people in the United States make poor eating choices. More than 84% of young people eat too much fat, and only 20% eat the recommended number of servings of fruits and vegetables each day. Nearly 25% of young people between the ages of 6 and 17 are considered overweight. The percentage of young people who are seriously overweight has more than doubled in the last 30 years.

People who are overweight are at increased risk for heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, and possibly cancer. Being overweight also worsens the disabilities associated with arthritis. In 1995, the total economic cost of obesity in the United States was \$99.2 billion.

CDC's National Leadership

In 1996, CDC released the landmark *Physical Activity and Health: A Report of the Surgeon General*. This report brings together, for the first time, what has been learned about physical activity and health from decades of research. Among its major findings are that physical activity need not be strenuous to produce health benefits, and that inactive people can improve their health by becoming moderately active on a regular basis. The important public health implications of these findings compel CDC, as the nation's prevention agency, to ensure that the promotion of physical activity is accorded the same degree of attention and commitment given to other important public health measures.

Getting the Message Out

To ensure that key research findings reach those whom they will benefit, CDC has collaborated with its public health partners to design and launch an award-winning national health communications campaign, *Physical Activity: It's Everywhere You Go*. The campaign is designed to emphasize the positive, satisfying, and social aspects of physical activity and to help busy adults find convenient, practical ways to fit activity into their everyday schedules. An important component is a marketing kit that provides health professionals and communities with easy-to-use tools designed to get people moving. These tools include ready-to-use print materials, radio and television public service announcements (including a spot starring Olympic gold medal speed skater Dan Jansen),

and information about how to work with the media and communities to promote physical activity.

CDC collaborates with the National Cancer Institute (NCI) to disseminate information on healthy eating and physical activity. CDC and NCI have partnered with state health departments to promote the national 5-A-Day program in supermarkets, farmers markets, schools, worksites, WIC programs, and communities and through the media.

Capitalizing on a Unique Opportunity to Improve Women's Health

CDC's National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program has provided life-saving screening for these two cancers to women in low-income groups. Active in every state, this program offers an established, community-based framework that provides a novel opportunity to address other high-priority health problems among women.

Since 1995, CDC has enabled three states—Arizona, Massachusetts, and North Carolina—to direct additional funding to screen women for factors that significantly increase their risk for cardiovascular disease, the leading cause of death among women. A portion of the women who are screened for breast and cervical cancer are also assessed for sedentary lifestyle, obesity, elevated cholesterol, high blood pressure, and smoking. In each of the three states, at least 50% of the women who participate in this

Physical Activity.



It's in the garden.



It's at the office.



It's in the park.

It's Everywhere You Go.

additional assessment have been found to be at increased risk for cardiovascular disease. These women are provided counseling, education, referral, and follow-up services. Addressing such risk factors early is important because women are often diagnosed with cardiovascular disease in its advanced stages, when treatment is less effective. This demonstration project, WISEWOMAN, helps reduce women's risk for cardiovascular disease and provides insights into the feasibility and benefits of making comprehensive, integrated preventive services available to women in low-income groups in all states.

Expanding the Knowledge Base

CDC conducts research to strengthen and expand the scientific basis for the role of physical activity and nutrition in health.

- A recent CDC analysis of data from the Bogalusa, Louisiana, heart study has shown that the prevalence of overweight and obesity among children and young adults increased more than threefold from 1973 to 1994. Furthermore, these trends appear to be accelerating. Because overweight in early life tends to be associated with chronic diseases in adulthood, these findings emphasize the importance of preventing obesity in children.
- Through CDC's Prevention Research Centers network, CDC and the National Institutes of Health are collaboratively developing better methods to measure physical activity levels. The research focuses on African-American, American Indian, Hispanic, and low-income white women older than age 40. This research will improve CDC's ability to target and evaluate health promotion efforts among these high-risk populations.
- A recent CDC project has developed improved approaches for physicians to counsel patients to improve their level of physical activity.

Reaching Young People Through Schools

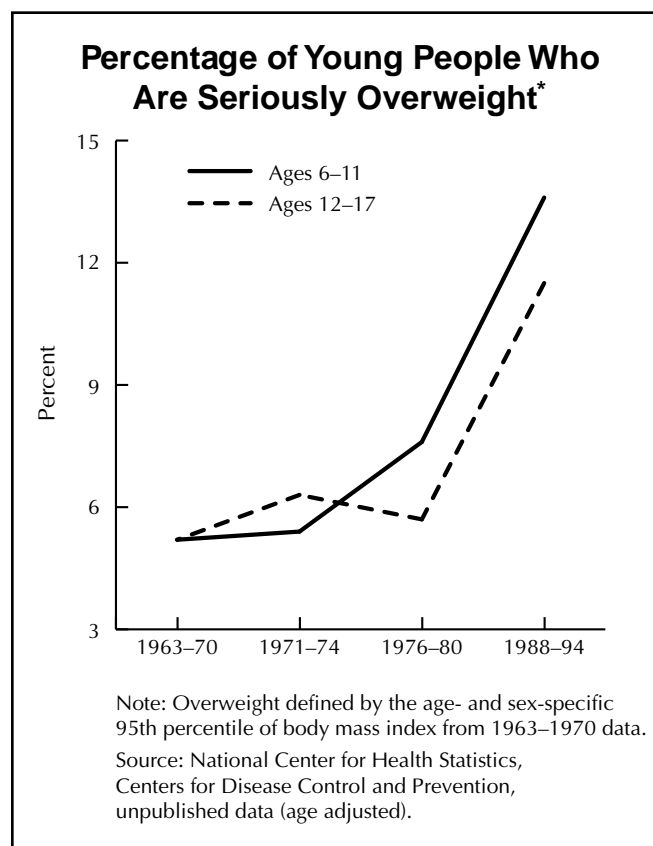
Lifelong health-related habits, including physical activity and eating patterns, are often established in childhood. Because ingrained behaviors are difficult to change as people grow older, public health measures need to reach young people early, before health-damaging behaviors are adopted.

Schools provide an ideal opportunity to make an enormous, positive impact on the health of the nation. To reach the more than 50 million young people in schools across the country, CDC has

established a nationwide framework for coordinated health education in schools. As part of this effort, simple, easily-referenced guidelines have been developed to assist educators and others in promoting lifelong physical activity and healthy eating among young people. Developed by CDC in collaboration with a variety of national health and education organizations, these guidelines are the first of their kind and are being used in schools and communities across the nation.

With fiscal year 1998 funding of \$9.9 million, CDC is directly assisting 15 states in providing coordinated health education in schools. Such education provides young people with the information and skills needed to make positive health behavior choices. Inactivity and unhealthy diets, together with tobacco use, are among the critical risk behaviors being addressed.

CDC is developing several instruments to assist schools in promoting healthy eating and physical activity. These include a self-assessment and program-planning tool. CDC is also collaborating with the American Medical Association and pediatric and family practice physicians to determine the extent to which these physicians are counseling their young patients on the importance of physical activity and healthy eating.



Future Directions

Although much remains to be learned about the role of physical activity and nutrition in health, a wealth of research makes it clear that in the United States today, inactivity and poor nutrition are responsible for many unnecessary deaths, illnesses, and disabilities associated with chronic diseases.

Physical activity and good nutrition play critical roles in promoting and maintaining health and in reducing the risk of chronic disease, and it is vitally important to get this message out to the American people. However, communicating the message alone is not enough. If individuals are to adopt and maintain healthy behaviors, such changes must be supported by programs, policies, and the environments in which they live.

Life expectancy for Americans has risen from 45 years at the turn of the century to 75 years today. Research has indicated that only 5 years of this 30-year gain can be attributed to curative medicine; the remaining 25 years represent advances in public health, through improved housing, sanitation, and immunization. Just as societal-level changes were necessary to address the ravages of disease earlier in this century, far-reaching environmental, social, and policy changes are needed now to address the major health threats of our time.

Twentieth-century innovations in transportation, food processing, and food availability have displaced the regular physical activity and the lower-fat, higher-fiber diets that used to be a natural part of everyday life. Collective action is required at the federal, state, and local levels to create or modify programs, policies, and practices that encourage and facilitate healthy living. CDC considers it a priority that individuals be afforded opportunities to pursue and maintain good health through such avenues as safe walking and cycling trails; low-fat, high-fruit-and-vegetable menu selections in restaurants, schools, and worksite cafeterias; and physical activity programs in schools, worksites, and community gathering places.

CDC, in collaboration with its public health partners at the national, state, and local levels, will pursue changes to the community environment that encourage healthy lifestyles. In addition, CDC is striving to expand health communications to promote the benefits of physical activity and good nutrition through worksites, schools, and health care settings. Although the messages are relatively simple, promoting, implementing, and reinforcing these messages to change individual, family, and community behaviors throughout the country is a key public health challenge for the coming century. The health of our nation depends on our successful response to this challenge.

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